

THE LEE COLLECTION

BY YVONNE HACKENBROCH

HART HOUSE
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



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THE LEE COLLECTION was formed by the late Viscount Lee of Fareham and Viscountess Lee, and presented by them to Hart House in 1940. The guiding principle in assembling these varied and largely unrelated objects was to illustrate the decorative arts of different periods by examples chosen for individual character and beauty. Detached from their original setting, as these objects necessarily are, they appear isolated and remote unless we consider them in connection with the period and culture to which they belong. So regarded, a work of art reflects the historical past and becomes an expression not only of the artist but also of the contemporary religious thought and social conventions.

The earliest exhibits in the Lee Collection are Chinese ceremonial bronzes, shown in Case 11. The covered wine vessel of the Chih type, with an owl as its decorative motif, was made during the "Shang-Yin" period (1766-1122 B.C.), the two-handled Kuei for offerings of millet and other grains, during the Middle Chou dynasty, about 900 B.C.

The art of the goldsmith, so well represented in the Lee Collection, assumed particular significance during the early Middle Ages. Europe was then undergoing a period of migrations and instability and no permanent centres for artistic enterprises were established. Craftsmen therefore concentrated on the making of small but precious objects which could easily be carried from place to place. And while pilgrims and crusaders

made their way to distant places new ideas of geography and of other ways of life combined to change men's outlook; it was along the routes followed by pilgrims that works of art first travelled. Oriental silks, Syrian glass, Byzantine reliquaries enclosing holy relics in precious metal shrines, ivories and miniatures, were all articles of trade and exercised a formative influence on early mediaeval art.

The mediaeval goldsmith may be compared to an architect pursuing his aims in a different and smaller medium; he prepared the way for the ultimate expression in monumental architecture and sculpture of the artistic spirit of the Middle Ages. Never had the goldsmith's art been held in such esteem, and men saw in the precious material the appropriate vehicle for religious thought. Goldsmiths were commissioned to provide the Church with liturgical art under the patronage of pious benefactors, as Suger of St. Denis (1081-1151), the outstanding abbot of the time, explains: "we profess that we must do homage also through the outward ornament of sacred vessels."

In the service of the Church mediaeval art became the Bible of the illiterate. Scenes from Holy Writ were illustrated on church walls, in windows, and on altar fronts. But the fear of encouraging idolatry prevented the making of life-sized statues. The wholesale destruction of images in Constantinople during the iconoclastic controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries was never forgotten. With the growth of the Gothic cathedral,

however, came the great opportunity for sculpture as portal decoration and it was then that the goldsmith, the ivory carver, and the miniaturist saw their own small-scale achievements amplified in monumental stonework.

The first three cases in the Lee Collection contain objects of religious art. A thirteenth-century statuette of the Virgin (Pl. I) in Case 1 shows the innate monumental character of mediaeval goldsmith's work. Made of silver hammered over a wooden core, the Madonna is enthroned in solemn dignity, her strictly frontal attitude based on the conventional Eastern conception of holy images. The style is less advanced than would be expected in the thirteenth century, but this is doubtless due to a provincial origin in some distant valley of the Alps.

With the emancipation of Gothic sculpture the minor arts change their character and abandon the massive rhythm of the Romanesque period. Figures turn into figurines and the minor arts become both intimate and somewhat precious.

The Flight into Egypt (Pl. 2), shown in silver relief upon a panel of copper gilt, has all the familiar charm of a genre scene; it may have formed part of a shrine, as is suggested by the incomplete architectural framework. The perfect harmony of pictorial theme and architectural form is characteristic of Gothic art in France, where this panel was made during the first half of the fourteenth century.

Another example of French Gothic art is a small ivory

diptych (Pl. 3), made of two tablets hinged together, one showing the Virgin and Child, the other the Crucifixion. Such little folding altar-pieces were used throughout the Middle Ages for devotion at home and on travels when it was not possible to worship in a church. The graceful swing and elegant pose of the figures suggest Paris workmanship of the later fourteenth century, during the period of the so-called international Gothic style (1370-1420), when Paris was the major centre both of art and of courtly fashion, and when French was the most widely spoken language in Europe. This supremacy was not shaken until the French were defeated in the battle of Agincourt.

The development of enamel in Europe can be studied in Case 3. Long before the establishment of monumental art in Western Europe, cloisonné enamel was made in the Byzantine Empire. Gold partitions soldered on a gold base form little cells which are filled with enamel fused by heat. The effect is similar to that of paintings in illuminated manuscripts where the background is gold. During the twelfth century, when European art submitted to the rule of architectural order and applied sculpture, champlevé enamel on copper was developed at Limoges in Northern France. Enamel, melted by firing, fills hollows scooped out in the copper. Architectural ideas determine the basic design of the work while figure subjects form the decoration. A reliquary in the Lee Collection (Pl. 4), on which the three Magi are represented, is a typical example of

the thirteenth century. The enamel colours are not unlike those of contemporary French cathedral windows and the copper partitions which form the design and hold the enamel resemble the strips of lead in which stained glass is set. Thus techniques mingle with one another and their cross-influences tend to create new forms of artistic expression.

Under the influence of the first easel paintings which begin to be common in the fifteenth century, enamel became a medium for painting on copper plaques which were then fired like all other true enamel. This practice flourished at Limoges, under the patronage of the great painters who were appearing in France and in the Low Countries. A beautiful example is the enamel roundel with the Virgin nursing her Child (Pl. 5) which was inspired by a painting of the Master of Flémalle.

Mediaeval artists, particularly craftsmen, often remained anonymous. Few names of artists have come down to us and little is known about their personal life or environment. Of George Lefèvre, who signed a pax—a tablet to receive the kiss of peace from the priest and congregation after Mass—we know nothing but the name. On this painted enamel in Case 3, which carries the date 1434, the Virgin and Child are represented with an angel who offers flowers to Jesus. The charming scene has all the quality and grace of the contemporary sonnets of Charles d'Orléans and Christine de Pisan.

Mediaeval manuscripts as shown in Case 2 are sometimes

signed by the scribe, although more often the name of the patron who ordered the volume is recorded instead. The arms of Louis de Giac and his wife Jeanne du Peschin appear in a French Book of Hours (Pl. 6), a work of the Paris school about the end of the fourteenth century. De Giac was chamberlain to the Duke of Berry, the great collector of manuscripts, and to John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy, from whose expedition to Hungary in 1396 he failed to return.

There is a Flemish prayerbook in the same case, written in 1480 for Dame Antonia de Masmines, hereditary Lady of Calkene. By that time printing had been invented and the writing and illumination of manuscripts had passed out of fashion. Engraving superseded miniature, and with the principle of mechanical repetition a new age began.

Most mediaeval works of art were instruments of Christian teaching and thus found sanctuary in churches, while secular art remained exposed to the vicissitudes of ordinary life. Where works of non-religious art survived it was often because they were owned by city corporations, colleges, or other powerful bodies. The English fourteenth-century drinking horn in Case 2 (Pl. 7), made of natural ox-horn and standing on silver-gilt bird legs, finds a close parallel in one preserved at Queen's College, Oxford, and in another at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Drinking horns were used for ceremonial occasions, such as investitures.

From fifteenth-century Spain comes a small chest in Case 3 (Pl. 8), made of leather over wood. Its wrought-iron mounts are in the shape of Gothic turrets and battlements, and the hasp is a miniature fortress barring access to the interior. The scallop shell as motif of decoration may well be the pilgrim's sign conveying a reference to the patron saint of Spain, James of Compostela.

With the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the discovery of America in 1492, the Middle Ages come to an end. Religious symbolism no longer expressed the vigorous spirit of a new age. Educational values began to change and the teaching of the Classics often took the place of theological studies. Art and literature found great encouragement in a new society which worshipped the heroes of classical mythology rather than the mediaeval saints. Henceforth nobility ceased to be the prerogative of feudal commanders, but was frequently conferred on outstanding scholars or on prosperous civil servants who, as a natural result, tended to surround themselves with luxuries and fine objects for daily use. And since the aim of all Renaissance education was the free development of personality, art became the expression rather of individual talent than of collective feeling. Artists began to sign their work more freely and goldsmiths to stamp their initials beside the hall marks.

A Nuremberg coconut-cup in Case 6 (Pl. 9) is a typical representative of a sixteenth-century goldsmith's work, com-

binning as it does a coconut-shell from the tropics with German silver-gilt settings. In these settings are portraits of Charles V and other royal personages, and the cup may well have been a presentation by the Emperor on the occasion of the crowning of his brother Ferdinand as German king in 1530; that at least is the date engraved on the shield of a figure on the cover of the cup.

Table-decorations made for prosperous merchants and aristocrats often came from Southern Germany. So does the silver-gilt tazza in the centre of the Lee Room which belonged to a set of twelve, each surmounted by the figure of a Roman Emperor. Domitian is shown on our example, Otho on a tazza at the Metropolitan Museum, Vespasian on one formerly in the Pierpont Morgan Collection. The set was commissioned by Ippolito Aldobrandini who was cardinal from 1585 to 1592 and became Pope Clement VIII.

From Augsburg comes the silver-gilt group of Diana riding on a stag; this is a mechanical toy, intended to move along the table for the amusement of convivial parties. The group was made by Matheus Wallbaum (1554-1632), but several variations are known, some with the master's mark of Joachim Friess, a goldsmith who belonged to the same workshop. The classical restraint of Renaissance form becomes submerged by a profusion of details such as the small figures of animals on the plinth under the prancing stag. This baroque exuberance is often found in the South German art of the period.

Tankards, cups, and beakers in Case 6 are all typical examples of German Renaissance silver and suggest comparison with the contemporary English work of which there are representatives in Case 7. A Chinese Ming porcelain box in an English silver-gilt setting (Pl. 10) speaks the language of a seafaring generation and fits well in the Elizabethan period. Affinities of workmanship and style, and such motifs of decoration as Tudor roses on the setting, relate the blue and white box to a Ming porcelain bowl in the British Museum and to a group of Chinese porcelains in English silver-gilt mounts of about 1580 at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, formerly owned by Lord Burghley.

Imported porcelain, of course, remained the privilege of the few who could afford luxuries whereas earthenware found general use. "Tigerware" jugs of brownish clay and mottled surface were popular, particularly when equipped with silver mounts—such as C. Eston of Exeter provided in 1594 for a jug in Case 7. At other times German stoneware was used. A white "Siegburg ware" jug from the Rhineland in the same case bears the initials of the potter Hans Hilgers and the date 1589. It so happens that the English goldsmith who supplied the setting stamped it with three trefoils in a shaped shield; this master's mark identifies him with the otherwise anonymous goldsmith who mounted the Chinese porcelains from Burghley House referred to above.

Many elaborate standing salts, wine cups, and jugs in Cases 7 and 8 reflect the prosperity of the Elizabethan age. Character-

istic is a silver-gilt "steeple cup," a tall vessel surmounted by a pinnacle on its lid, with London hall marks for 1602-3 and the goldsmith's initials A. B. Under puritan influence this florid style came to an end with a new simplicity of form and a less exuberant surface decoration.

The jewellery of the Renaissance, of which examples are shown in Case 4, follows such designs as painter-engravers published in pattern-books. Small allegorical figures of religious or mythological significance set the theme. An excellent example is the pendant with Venus and Cupid. It is the delicacy of the enamel-work rather than the sparkle of the precious stones which commends these ornaments (Pl. 11). But once Brazilian diamonds and Indian rubies began to reach Europe through the gateway of the Spanish peninsula, goldsmiths used them liberally, until at length a ring or a pendant was often valued more for its material than for its workmanship. A certain Holbein-esque influence can be observed in some purely ornamental ruby and diamond rings in Case 4. Other so-called *memento mori* rings showing a coffin with its corpse, a skeleton or an hour-glass, are reminders of the brevity of life and the certainty of death. After the XVIIth century, however, these rings became less macabre and gained a more sentimental and personal appeal in commemorating a beloved friend or relative. Examples in the next case show how a miniature portrait or a

lock of hair were often enclosed in the bevel of a ring with the name and date of parting engraved round the band.

A beautiful silver-gilt toilet service of many pieces, in Case 10, is indicative of the elegance of eighteenth-century life. The set was made by Johann Erhard Heuglin II of Augsburg in 1735-36. Enamelled scent-bottles of Bristol glass and snuff-boxes made of semi-precious stones with diamond studded thumb-pieces, in Case 5, conclude this selection of works of art which rendered the daily life of a fashionable society more brilliant. An oval snuff-box of three-coloured gold (Pl. 12), by Ambroise Nicolas Cousinet of Paris, was made in 1773-74, only five years before the outbreak of the French Revolution. That upheaval had a sobering effect upon artistic imagination, which now abandoned the realm of elegant fancy and devoted itself to more pedestrian pursuits.

The nineteenth century brought with it a tide of Romanticism which drowned the Gothic Revival in sentimentality, and this limits the hunting ground of the conservative art collector. Some such feeling may have persuaded Lord Lee of Fareham to include as the only modern piece in this collection a gold tazza which exactly carries out an original design by Hans Holbein. A drawing of 1537 thus found realization 400 years later, through the hands of the English goldsmith Omar Ramsden.

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8. Casket. Spanish, XVth century.
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12. Snuff-box, made by A. N. Cousinet. Paris, France, 1773-74.

PLATES



1. THE VIRGIN (CHILD MISSING). ALPINE, XIIIth CENTURY.



2. FLIGHT INTO EGYPT. FRENCH, FIRST HALF XIVth CENTURY.



3. IVORY DIPTYCH. FRENCH, SECOND HALF XIVth CENTURY.



4. RELIQUARY. LIMOGES, FRANCE, XIIIth CENTURY.



Deus in adiutorium
meum intende.
Domine ad adiuu-
dum me festina.

Gloria
Sicut
semper
Gloria
in uirgine
Marian
nos ab ho-
sufax.
Gloria
gine ann
vitrua sec
Qua
Domini
elabus m



7. DRINKING HORN. ENGLISH, XIVth CENTURY.



8. CASKET. SPANISH, XVth CENTURY.



9. COCONUT-CUP. NUREMBERG, GERMANY, 1530.



10. CHINESE MING PORCELAIN BOX. THE SETTING ENGLISH, ABOUT 1580.



11. PENDANT. GERMAN, SECOND HALF XVIIIth CENTURY.



12. SNUFF-BOX, MADE BY A. N. COUSINET. PARIS, FRANCE, 1773-74.



